

U.B. 289.932 M1225 1923

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A review of the division of 1889  
in the Church of the United  
Brethren in Christ and reasons...

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1923

A REVIEW OF THE DIVISION OF 1889

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In The Church  
Of The United Brethren In Christ  
and  
Reasons for Re-uniting

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THESIS

by

G. E. MacCanon

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"We are not divided,  
All one body we,  
One in hope and doctrine,  
One in charity.

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A great deal would be accomplished toward the completion of the Kingdom of God if this verse were true. Perhaps we do have the same hope, but in doctrine there is a great difference, and in some communities it looks as though different churches had but little, if any, love for each other. While it would not be best for all denominations to unite, making one great church, yet it is believed that much friction would be done away, and there would be less wasted energy if there were fewer small and struggling denominations.

It is quite easy for people of one denomination to see the divisions in another denomination and point out good reasons why they should unite. Almost every church has in its history a division over some little question which has no relation to salvation, which is not fundamental. Instead of seeing the faults in other churches, let each review its own history and find out if it has some trouble that ought to be adjusted.

Because of this belief that churches that are related but are separated because of some trouble ought to come together, the writer is trying to find the possibility of healing the wound of his own Church, The Church of The United Brethren in Christ.

There was a division in this Church in 1889, and the two organizations have not worked well together, but have been opposed to each other wherever they have come in contact.

It is the purpose of this paper, first, to review the history of the division of this Church, to determine, if possible, the real cause of the division. Every case has a real or underlying cause, but often the legal statement of the trouble is very different. The legal question in this case dealt only with whether the Constitution and Confession of Faith had been changed or not. Second, to investigate conditions today, to discover whether or not the same cause, or causes, still exist, -if the causes still exist to show the possibility of overcoming them, and if they no longer exist, to show the possibility of uniting the two branches of the Church which was founded by Otterbein and Boehm.

The Conference of 1885 met in Fostoria, Ohio, May 14. To the standing committee on Revision was referred the constitution, the confession of faith, and Section 3, of Chapter 10 of the discipline. On the fifth day of the Conference this Committee reported, --S.M.Hippard, Chairman:

"The Committee entered upon its work with a great deal of fear. I wish to say this, -that the Committee was generally harmonious. The Spirit of Christ prevailed in its sessions. In arriving at these conclusions it has been nearly unanimous.

The first part of the report was adopted by eleven to two. Some objections were made to one or two items. In the supplementary report made as to the questions on secret combinations the Committee was unanimous".

It was agreed that the report be read in full and considered the next day.

- The Report -

To The General Conference:

Your committee to which was referred the confession of faith, constitution, and Section 3 of Chapter 10 of the Discipline, beg leave to report that we have given these subjects much and most prayerful attention, and now submit the result of our deliberations:

First. We find that the present constitution of the Church was never submitted to the suffrage of the members and ministry of the Church for ratification either by popular vote or by conventional approval, though it purports to be the constitution of the "members" of the denomination.

Second. We find, by reference to the records, that throughout most of its history it has been the subject of question and differences of opinion as to its legality and binding force as an organic law.

Third. We find also that the clause found in Article II., Section 4, which says, "No rule or ordinance shall at any time be passed to change or do away with the confession of faith as it now stands;" and Article IV., which says, "There shall be no alteration of the foregoing constitution unless by request of two-thirds of the whole society," are in their language and apparent meaning so far-reaching as to render them extraordinary and impracticable as articles of constitutional law.

Fourth. From the facts and reasons thus indicated we conclude that the constitution has acquired its force only by the partial and silent assent of the Church, and that the General Conference has a right to institute measures looking to the amendment, modification, or change of the constitution at any time when it is believed that a majority of our people favor a modification thereof.

Fifth. It is the sense and belief of your committee that the constitution, as it stands, is not in harmony with the present wishes of our people, as has been indicated in discussions, petitions, and elections during the past year.

Sixth. For these reasons, and for the purpose of finally settling all questions of dispute and matters of disturbance to the peace and harmony of the Church, so far as the confession of faith and the constitution are concerned, your committee would recommend the adoption of the following paper; namely:

## Church Commission-

WHEREAS, Our confession of faith is silent or ambiguous upon some of the cardinal doctrines of the Bible, as held and believed by our church; and,

WHEREAS, It is desirable and needful to so amend and improve our present constitution as to adapt its provisions more fully to the wants and conditions of the Church in this and future time; therefore,

Resolved, By the delegates of the annual conferences of the church of the United Brethren in Christ, in General Conference assembled, that a church commission, composed of twenty-seven persons, and consisting of the bishops of the Church, and ministers and laymen appointed and elected by this body, an equal number from each bishop's district, -provided that the Pacific District shall have two members besides its bishop, -be and is hereby authorized and established.

The duties and powers of this commission shall be to consider our present confession of faith and constitution, and prepare such a form of belief and such amended fundamental rules for the government of this church in the future as will, in their judgment, be best adapted to secure its growth and efficiency in the work of evangelization of the world.

Provided 1. That this commission shall preserve unchanged in substance the present confession of faith, so far as it is clear.

2. That it shall also retain the present itinerant plan.

3. It shall keep sacred the general usages and distinctive principles of the Church on all great moral reforms as sustained by the word of God, in so far as the province of their work may touch them.

Provided further, That in the final adoption, as a whole, of a confession of faith and constitution for submission to the Church by the commission a majority vote of all the members composing the commission shall be necessary.



Resolved, That this commission shall meet at such time and place as the Board of Bishops may appoint, and is expected to complete its work by January 1st, 1886.

The Commission shall also adopt and cause to be executed a plan by which the proposed confession of faith and constitution may receive the largest possible attention and expression of approval or disapproval by our people, including all necessary regulations for taking, counting, and reporting the vote.

Resolved, That when, according to the foregoing provisions, the result of the vote of the Church shows that two thirds of all the votes cast have been given in approval of the proposed confession of faith and constitution, it shall be the duty of the bishops to publish and proclaim said result through the official organs of the Church. Whereupon the confession of faith and constitution thus ratified and adopted shall become the fundamental belief and organic law of this church.

Provided further, That the adoption of the constitution as aforesaid shall in no wise affect any legislation of this General Conference for the coming quadrennium.

Resolved, That in case of any vacancy in the commission, by death, resignation, or otherwise, the commission shall fill such vacancy.

S.M.Hippard,- Chairman.  
L.Bookwalter, Secretary.

#### Supplementary Report

We recommend that the following law in relation to secret combinations be adopted to take the place of Section 3, Chapter X, of Discipline.

#### Secret Combinations

A secret combination, in the sense of the constitution, is a secret league or confederation of persons holding principles and laws at variance with the word of God and infringing upon the natural, social, political, or religious rights of those outside its pale.



Any member or minister of our church found in connection with such combination shall be dealt with as in other cases of disobedience to the order and discipline of the Church in case of members, as found on page 23 of Discipline in answer to the third question of Section 3, Chapter IV., and in case of ministers, as found in Chapter VI. Section 13, page 65.

-S.M.Hippard, Chairman  
--Committee-ff.

-Minority Report-

We, your Committee on Constitution, Confession of Faith, and Section 3 of Chapter X, would report as follows;

We have deliberately considered the important interests committed to us and have concluded as follows;

1. The constitution we now have in the Discipline, and have had for forty-four years, is the constitution of the church of the United Brethren in Christ, and every member legally received into the Church for years has consented to be governed by the same. It was declared legal also by the General Conference of 1849, and to it our legislation has conformed, and under its directions our officers have been elected and the General Conference formed according to its provisions.

2. This constitution makes no provision for the General Conference to alter or change it without first securing the consent of the members of the Church by a two-thirds vote, as required in Article IV, of the constitution and to take any other method would not be legal.

3. It is our view that this question as to the constitution should be determined before we revise Section 3 of Chapter X.

J. G. Mosher.  
Wm. Dillon.

The majority report was considered and it was discussed for most of two days. It is impossible to give here the discussion that took place. Most of it was centered around the questions of the constitutionality of the Church Commission, but there were a few remarks by those that opposed it, which shows they were more concerned about the secret society question than they were about the constitutionality of the proposal. Then, the fact that Section 3 of Chapter 10 was also referred to this Committee shows that a change in relation to secret societies was expected. The report was adopted with a slight amendment.

Articles one, two and four call in question the validity of the constitution of the Church of 1841, and are very important. Article 3 has no bearing on the subject at all. Simply because a constitution is binding is no reason to throw it over, contrary to law.

Article 5 states that the Constitution of 1841 was out of harmony with the wishes of the people. This is no reason for doing away with the constitution illegally. If the constitution of 1841 was legal, then the Church of the United Brethren in Christ of the old Constitution is right, morally, regardless of legal decisions.

If the constitution of 1841 was illegal, then the Church of the United Brethren in Christ of the new constitution is right.

According to Henry S. Spayth, whose history of the Church was written in 1851, -also according to John Lawrence, whose history of the Church was written in 1860, - there is no question of validity. They simply state that the conference of 1841 adopted a constitution. Daniel Berger in his history of the Church, which was published in 1897, gives us to understand that the constitution of 1841 was not legal. So we are dependent upon the conference minutes to determine which is correct.

According to the conference minutes of 1837 a constitution was adopted and signed unanimously. This body of men, knowing they had not been instructed by the members of the church to form a constitution, left this constitution to be considered at the next general conference, after the members of the church had an opportunity to consider it. The members to the next general conference were elected according to their attitude toward this constitution. They were either to accept or reject this constitution.

When the conference of 1841 met, the first question that they considered in regard to a constitution was not whether they would accept the constitution of 1837, but whether they would have a constitution. This question was passed by a vote of 15 to 7.

Then a committee was appointed to draw up a constitution. The constitution of 1837 was not considered. A new constitution was drawn up and adopted by a majority. The exact vote is not known.

A comparison of the two constitutions will show whether or not they are the same:

#### Constitution of 1837

##### Article I.

Sec.1. All ecclesiastical power herein granted, to make or repeal any rule of Discipline, shall be vested in a General Conference, which shall consist of ministers chosen and elected by the members, in every conference district throughout the society. Nevertheless nothing shall be done so as to change the article of faith or in any wise destroy the itinerant plan.

Sec.2. No minister shall be considered eligible for election until he has stood in the capacity of as elder for the term of three years, having maintained a good moral character during that time. Any elder receiving a transfer from one conference to another, shall not be considered eligible for election under a term of two years, and not then without a sufficient recommendation from the conference of which he had been a member.

Sec. 3. The number of delegates from each conference district shall not exceed one for every five hundred members. But should it so happen that a conference would be formed in a territory not having five hundred members within its district, that conference shall nevertheless have one delegate to represent its members in General Conference.

Sec. 4. If any vacancies should occur through sickness or otherwise after the election of delegates, it shall be the duty of the presiding elder or elders immediately to notify the next highest on the list of votes that he is now a member to represent that district in the ensuing General Conference.

Sec. 5. The bishops shall upon all occasions be considered members of the General Conference, to preside as the organs of that body as in annual conferences. Bishops shall be elected every four years, during the sitting of the General Conference, by the members of that body, from among the elders throughout the Church, who may have stood in that capacity for a term, not less than six years.

Sec. 6. The General Conference shall be held once every four years. At the adjournment of which it shall be the duty of the same to publish or cause to be published, (excepting such parts as may not be considered expedient) all their proceedings, for the benefit of society in general.

## Article II.

Sec. 1. The members in each conference district shall solely have the privilege of choosing and electing the delegates for General Conference, which shall invariably be done at least three months previous to the sitting of the same.

Sec. 2. In the election of delegates for General Conference, it shall be the duty of each annual conference to appoint a committee of three, in their several conference districts, to receive and count the votes, and immediately apprise those who may have been elected.

Sec. 3. It shall also be the duty of the annual conference to furnish the presiding elders with a list of all the elders eligible for election. The presiding elders shall furnish each circuit-preacher in charge whose duty it shall be to furnish each class leader or steward throughout the circuit with a copy of the same.

Sec. 4. It shall be the duty of each class leader or steward to appoint a meeting of the members of each class, for the purpose of electing, by ballot or otherwise, one or more delegates to represent them in General Conference.

Sec. 5. It shall also be the duty of each class-leader or steward to sign, enclose and seal each bill of election, hand it over to the preacher in charge; he again to the presiding elder, whose duty it shall be to transmit the same to the committee appointed by the annual conference.

Sec. 6. The committee appointed to receive and count the votes shall make a list of all the persons voted for and the number of votes for each. Should any two or more of the candidates have an equal number of votes, the individuals thus appointed shall determine by lot who or which of them are elected. They shall also forward the names of those elected to the conference printing establishment for publication.

### Article III.

Sec. 1. Each annual conference shall come fully under the jurisdiction of the General Conference, except under such regulations as the General Conference may deem expedient in relation to local matters, so as not to prove prejudicial to the interest of the whole society.

Sec. 2. The business of each annual conference shall strictly be done according to Discipline.

Sec. 3. Any annual conference acting in violation of the doings of General Conference, shall, by impeachment, be tried by the same.

Sec. 4. No annual conference shall have the exclusive right to form or admit any new conference within the bounds of society, without the consent of the General Conference.

Sec. 5. All officers, whether bishops, presiding elders etc., shall, on impeachment, be dealt with according to Discipline, as other members, expelled or retained, as the case may require.

## Article IV.

Sec. 1. If at any time after the passing of this constitution it should be contemplated either to alter or amend the same, it shall be the privilege of any member in society to publish or cause to be published such contemplation at least three months before the election of delegates to the General Conference.

Sec. 2. No General Conference shall have the power to alter or amend the foregoing constitution, except it be by a vote of two thirds of that body.

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## Constitution of 1841

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## Article I.

Sec. 1. All ecclesiastical power herein granted, to make or repeal any rule of discipline, is vested in a general conference, which shall consist of elders, elected by the members in every conference district throughout the society; provided, however, such elders shall have stood in that capacity three years, in the conference district to which they belong.

Sec. 2. General Conference is to be held every four years; the bishops to be considered members and presiding officers.

Sec. 3. Each annual conference shall place before the society the names of all the elders eligible to membership in the General Conference.

## Article II.

Sec. 1. The General Conference shall define the boundaries of the annual conferences.

Sec. 2. The General Conference shall, at every session, elect bishops from among the elders throughout the Church, who have stood six years in that capacity.



Sec. 3. The business of each annual conference shall be done strictly according to Discipline; and any annual conference acting contrary thereunto, shall, by impeachment, be tried by the General Conference.

Sec. 4. No rule or ordinance shall at any time be passed, to change or do away the Confession of Faith as it now stands, nor to destroy the itinerant plan.

Sec. 5. There shall no rule be adopted that will infringe upon the rights of any as it relates to the mode of baptism, the sacrament of the Lord's supper, or the washing of feet.

Sec. 6. There shall be no rule made that will deprive local preachers of their votes in the annual conferences to which they severally belong.

Sec. 7. There shall be no connection with secret combinations, nor shall involuntary servitude be tolerated in any way.

Sec. 8. The right of appeal shall be inviolate.

### Article III.

The right, title, interest, and claim of all property, whether consisting in lots of ground, meeting-houses, legacies, bequests or donations of any kind, obtained by purchase or otherwise, by any person or persons, for the use, benefit, and behoof of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, is hereby fully recognized and held to be the property of the Church aforesaid.

### Article IV.

There shall be no alteration of the foregoing constitution, unless by request of two thirds of the whole society.

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The difference in these two documents is so apparent it is almost impossible for any one to think them the same. Is the constitution of 1841 valid? If the constitution of 1837 is invalid because it had not been given to members of the Church for consideration, then the constitution of 1841 is invalid for the same reason. It was never submitted to the people. If the constitution of 1837 was valid, the constitution of 1841 was invalid, because the first constitution required a two-thirds vote of the general conference to amend it, and the second constitution was passed by a majority, but the vote was not counted and it is impossible to show that it was passed by a two-thirds vote.

The constitution of 1841 was invalid, therefore, and the conference of 1885 had a right to appoint the Church Commission to draw up a new constitution.

Immediately after this conference those that opposed the action of the conference started a paper - "The Conservator". The first issue came out July 15th. In this issue was a history of attitude that the United Brethren Church had taken toward secret societies, and for the following three years the main point of attack was secret societies.

It was not until after the conference of 1889 that they attacked other parts of the work done by the conference in regard to a constitution.

The commission completed its work before January 1, 1886, and formulated plans for submitting the new confession of faith and constitution to the vote of the membership of the Church. The vote was taken in November 1888 which lacked but one month of being three years. When the vote was taken the result was an adoption by a two-thirds majority and several thousand votes to spare.

At the conference of 1889 the work of the commission was discussed and the new constitution was discussed at great length. It was declared by some of those that opposed it that the whole proposition was backed by Freemasonry. After nearly two days discussion the report of the commission was adopted with only twenty votes against it. The next day a resolution was proposed with the purpose of keeping the conference in harmony, and was referred to the proper committee. Then the Board of Bishops made their proclamation declaring that the new constitution was now legal and in force.

At this time fifteen of the opposition left the conference and went to another building for which they had previously made arrangements. Here they proceeded to hold general conference, and claimed that they were the true Church.

The Church of the <sup>New</sup>~~old~~ constitution had possession of most of the property and the Church of the old constitution brought suit. There followed several years of trial. Of the thirty some cases, all but one were finally decided in favor of the Church of the new constitution. After the trials some said that where the courts were Masonic, the decisions were in favor of the new constitution, but where the courts were not Masonic the decision was in favor of the old constitution.

Considering that all the cases, but one, were decided in favor of the new constitution and this one was not a decision in favor of either side, but simply left the question to the vote of each congregation, it does not seem possible that all of the Supreme Courts were Masonic.

In the general conference of 1873 petitions were presented representing one-sixteenth of the entire Church, asking for an amendment in the constitution to allow lay delegation.

An amendment was proposed and passed and several of those who withdrew from the Church in 1889 because the constitution had been changed, had voted for the amendment in 1873. This shows that it was not so much the illegal change of the constitution as it was the change of some particular part.

When we consider, -(1) that the secret society question had been causing much trouble in the Church since about 1863, and very strict laws had been made prohibiting members from joining them, -(2) that secret societies had been openly attacked in the debate on this question at both the conferences of 1885 and 1889, -(3) that those that later formed the Church of the old constitution started their paper by giving the history of the Church's attitude toward secret societies, and (4) that after it was all over the losers claimed the courts were Masonic, -it is a fair conclusion that the real cause of the division was the secrecy question.

Does this cause still exist?

Members of the Church of the old constitution who answered said that the cause of the division of the Church in 1889 was the secrecy question, and that the only ground on which they would unite would be for the Church of the new

constitution to return to the position of the constitution of 1841, which means that there could be no connection with any secret societies. It is practically impossible for the Church of the new constitution to return to that position, because there are not a few that belong to the lodges.

So it would seem on the surface that the cause still exists and that there is very little chance for any consideration of the question. But there are evidences that look encouraging. One is the fact that several ministers that were members of the Church of the old constitution have left that Church and joined the Church of the new constitution. When they have been asked their position on the secrecy question most of them say that they personally would not join a lodge, but that they think it is an individual question and not related to the question of salvation, and that if anyone can join a secret society and still be a Christian they have no right to interfere.

Another hopeful sign is the situation at Philomath, Oregon, where as the children of those adhering to the old constitution at one time were not even allowed to walk across the campus of the college which belonged to the

Church of the new constitution they are now allowed to enroll and attend school there. Also the young people of the two Churches there can and do meet in the same prayer meeting and worship together.

There are several ministers who did belong to the Church of the old constitution who have joined other churches. When they are asked regarding their stand on the secrecy question they reply that they are absolutely opposed and that they could not, therefore, join the Church of the new constitution because they allow secret society members to join. Yet these other churches allow secret society members to join and they know it. One of these, and a good representative of them, is Dr. Henry J. Becker of Dayton, Ohio. At one time he was Bishop in that Church. Is this consistent? Does it not show so far as this group is concerned that the first cause doesnot exist, and that something has taken its place?

Bishop Hoshkins of that Church writes that he knows practically all of their preachers, both east and west and if their Church would go to pieces tomorrow, ninety percent of their preachers would join other branches of the Protestant Church rather than come to the Church of



Of the new constitution. So not only those who have left that Church are inconsistent, but practically all who are now ministers in that Church.

Also Bishop Hoshkins writes that if the Church leaders should declare a union of the Churches, the membership would not follow, but would join other Churches.

From these three groups of people just named there is good evidence that the cause of the division does not exist, but something has taken its place. This something is an unforgiving spirit. It is the remembering of ill feelings. If it were not for the fact that they join other churches it would be likely that they had a conscientious cause, but since they do, and would, before they would join the Church of the new constitution, how can it be otherwise but as stated above.

The real cause of the division does not exist at the present time and there is no real reason why the two churches should not unite.

There are several good reasons why these two branches of the same Church should unite. Churches which have the same historical development ought to be

drawn together by the sympathy they should have, one for the other. These two Churches point to Otterbein as their founder. Both honor and revere him. Both churches pay their respects to the same heroes of the past. Surely there is some power, even tho' it be sentiment, to help to draw the two branches of the United Brethren Church together, when one considers their past history

Also, having the same historical development, they naturally have developed the same lines of thought, for example, in doctrines. Their beliefs and teachings are practically the same. There may be a little difference in the wording as they stand in printed form, but the thought is the same.

In the matter of Church government they are nearly the same. At the present time there is some agitation in the church of the old constitution for a constitutional amendment to allow lay delegation. If this change is made the government of the two churches would be so near alike that very little change would be necessary if a union was effected.

There are also places where the two churches are located in the same community, both struggling for existence and neither can ever grow as long as the other is there. It is a waste of time and money and a great deal of effort is lost in fighting one another rather than fighting the forces of evil. It would be for the betterment of that community and for the advancement of God's kingdom if they were united.

The spirit of Christianity is brotherhood and forgiveness, and also to heal wounds which divide the members of the same body. As long as things stand as they now do, with the two branches of the Church standing out against one another, they seem to agitate rather than heal the wound.

Why can we not show our Christianity, and with a spirit of forgiveness come together into a united Church again. At this time when the cry of all Christendom is to get together, we ought to do all that is within our power to advance the cause of Christ.

Then, the two churches would be a greater force united than they are, or ever can be, separated.

Not only are there reasons why they should get together, but it is their duty to get together, because it is the duty of any church to do its best to glorify Christ by putting into practice His teachings.

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